No. 48

The REDEMPTION of Marie Gordon

THE TRAGIC STORY OF WRONGED WOMANHOOD

Price 10¢

Don't worry about that," he told her. "Marie will never find out through me that you and I had a late dinner together."

R. of M. G., No. 48.

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PHILIP GORDON blushed furiously at sight of his wife. For a few seconds their eyes met and hung on to each other. There was something in those of Alice that gave him a slight shock. He knew the look. It presaged trouble of some sort. For an instant only he paused, then passed swiftly into the hall.

But somehow he had the instinctive feeling that she wanted to see him, and that she had some communication to make.

Then he heard her voice.

"Wait a moment, please, Phil," it said plaintively. "I would like to speak to you."

Gordon stopped abruptly and faced his wife.

"What is it?" he asked coldly.

"We better send for the doctor," she told him. "I am afraid little Phyllis is sick."

"Phyllis sick?" he gasped. "Why was I not told about this sooner?"

Without waiting for a reply from Alice he ran downstairs. To his intense relief he found that Dr. Van Buren had not yet left the house. He found him in the kitchen chatting with Mrs. Jennings.

In a few rapid words he informed the physician of his little girl's sudden illness and both men hurried to the nursery.

Annie had the little girl in her arms. She showed symptoms of fever. Her delicate features were flushed and her eyes were unnaturally bright. She submitted to an examination very quietly. But the moment Alice came into the room, she became restless.

"Don't let her come near me, dad," the child whispered to Phil. "I am afraid of her."

Gordon contracted his brows. It was not a pleasant task for him to tell Alice to leave the room, but he

went through with it.

"Alright," she snapped, her eyes flashing angrily. "I don't care to be where I am not wanted."

With that she swept from the room, slamming the door behind her. Gordon and Dr. Van Buren looked at one another. Neither said a word. It was not at all necessary.

"I don't think it is anything serious," commented the physician as he finished his examination. "No doubt the little girl has been upset by the leaving of her—of her governess. I'll give her something to make her sleep, and to-morrow she'll be alright."

Gordon suppressed a groan. He was not surprised that Marie's leaving had such an effect upon the child.

"How is Harry?" he inquired, turning to Annie.

"He is soundly asleep in his own room," the girl answered. "He surprised me, Mr. Gordon. When Miss Desmond left he behaved like a little man. But," she added, wiping a furtive tear from her eyes, "I know his heart was near breaking."

"The chances are that Miss—Miss Desmond will be back here in a day or two," he told the girl. "I am going after her to-morrow."

"You—you are going after her?" gasped Annie.

"Yes, and while I am away, do not allow anyone to come near the child," the master of the house ordered. "Not even Mrs. Gordon. Both of my children I commit to your care."

Annie stared at Phil. It was a very peculiar stare, but he did not see it.

"I'll care for the children as if they were my very own," she said. "And I am glad that—that Mrs. Gordon may be excluded from the nursery. Both of the youngsters seem to be afraid of her."

There was no reply forthcoming to this. Dr. Van

Buren succeeded in coaxing little Phyllis to sleep through the means of a mild opiate. Then he took Gordon by the arm and led him from the room. Once more they indulged in a lengthy confidential chat in the library after which the physician left.

Chapter 155

THE SEARCH.

IT HAS been said that the greatest hell on earth is reserved for the man who returns to his empty house from his wife's funeral and begins to ask himself whether he was or was not responsible for her death. But there is one even more terrible than that — believing he is in a large measure responsible for her shame.

And Philip Gordon stretched himself on that bed of torture after he returned home after a vain two hours' search.

"Try to get some rest and a few hours sleep," were the last words of advise Dr. Van Buren had given him as they parted. "And above all things, don't worry. We will find her to-morrow, you and I, Phil, old man."

As Gordon lay on his bed, his eyes resting on the square white patch in the wall through which streamed the silvery rays of a fading moon, he made a tremendous effort to follow his friend's advise.

But he might as well have tried to move the rock of Gibraltar.

It was utterly impossible. His brain was filled with the most horrible thoughts and his heart was heavy with conflicting emotions. He realized the enormity of his mistake when it was too late.

"Oh, God, help me find her," he began to pray. And it was the first word of prayer Philip Gordon had uttered since he was a boy. "Help me to find her for the sake of two innocent children who have never offended You."

Never in all his life had Gordon greeted the break of dawn with more eagerness. He rose, impatient to renew the search.

A cold bath refreshed him somewhat. He dressed hurriedly and walked softly toward the nursery. The maid was seated on the bed, her hand caressing the dark curly head on the pillow.

"How is our little patient this morning, Annie?" he asked, trying hard to appear cheerful.

"Oh, just splendid," the girl responded warmly. "She has been awake for almost an hour and I have been telling her fairy tales."

The father approached the bed and leaned over.

"Phyllis, my little darling," he said tenderly.

His reward was a smile so sweet and reminiscent that it hurt him.

Then came the barely audible lisp, "Daddy—Daddy."

With a sob he could no longer restrain, Philip Gordon buried his face in the pillow.

The child gazed wonderingly at the big shoulders convulsed by something she could not understand. It was quite natural that her little hands should pat them.

Presently Gordon rose. His face was set.

"I am going out again with Dr. Van Buren this morning," he said, his voice remarkably steady. "I will be very busy the next few days and I don't want to be bothered with social or business calls. If the telephone rings, just say that I am out of the city."

He took the girl's hand and pressed it.

"Take the best care of my little treasure there. If she needs medical attention while Dr. Van Buren and I are away, send for Dr. Wilson. But whatever you do, don't leave the children alone."

Annie nodded and smiled.

"You know I will not," she said heartily.

Gordon turned hastily and left the room.

Upon his arrival in the breakfast room he found that his appetite had left him completely.

In fact, the odor of fried eggs and toast sickened him. He tried a cup of strong coffee. It seemed to brace him and he drank another.

Going into the library, he lit a cigar. It was barely eight o'clock when Dr. Van Buren arrived. After the usual exchange of greetings they sat down to map out a plan for the day.

"First of all, I want the fact that my wife was here kept secret, absolutely secret," Gordon began. "Does your sister know?"

"Why, no," the physician answered without hesitation. 'She hasn't the least idea. I talked to her this morning before I came here and she gave me no inkling that she had any knowledge of it."

Phil nodded.

"That's good," he said. "And if she did know, I believe she would keep it to herself. I regard your sister as one of my best and most loyal friends."

Dr. Van Buren made no reply to this. And he had a reason for avoiding the matter referred to in the last words.

"I think it would be well to make inquiries at the homes of all your relatives," he suggested. "It is quite possible that she may have gone to one of them for temporary refuge."

"No, I don't think so," the other disagreed. "That would be the first step to start the gossips on their way. Besides, there are only three of them here in Chicago. Marie has her Aunt Julia and two cousins. I have none. It is not at all likely that she has gone to either of them.

"Marie's two cousins are two very respectable

maiden ladies who operate a fashionable dressmaking establishment on State Street. They never liked my wife and that feeling was mutual.

"As for Marie's Aunt Julia, that narrow-gaged old prude would never allow her to enter the house."

"Yes," the physician assented, "no doubt you are right. Has Marie any relations elsewhere?"

"One sister. You remember her, don't you?" Phil Gordon suppressed a sigh. "She was here at our wedding. She caused a mild sensation among the ultra-respectable guests with her frivolous chatter and short skirts."

Dr. Van Buren smiled.

"Oh, yes. I recall her. She is an actress. Julia —Julia Carey."

"That is her name." Gordon broke in.

"Yes—yes." Dr. Van Buren exclaimed suddenly as if a new and important idea had just occurred to him. "I remember the girl vividly. She was very beautiful and almost your wife's double, only a few years older."

Gordon's mind wandered back a few years.

"I was never very close to Marie's relatives," he declared slowly. "You know I hadn't time for that sort of thing. What little I do know about them I heard from Marie. I remember her telling me that this Aunt Julia nearly had a stroke of apoplexy when her name sake niece went on the stage."

"Where is Julia Carey?" the doctor asked after a pause.

"That I don't know," came back hesitatingly. "For a long time Marie was in constant touch with her but for almost a year we had no letter or communication of any kind. Her last letter came from Hollywood, California. I believe she was trying to land a movie contract."

A lengthy space of silence ensued. And strangely their thoughts were traveling in the same direction.

Neither of them was anxious to approach the subject, however.

Finally Dr. Van Buren rose to the occasion.

"There is a slight possibility that she went back to Chicago," he said slowly.

"Yes." Gordon answered, his face whitening. Then again, "Yes," in a low tone. "I—I dread to think of her going back to that city."

"So do I," the physician replied. "Did Marie have any money of her own?" he asked.

The other shook his head.

"No. Immediately after our marriage she insisted upon my tying her money up in my business. I wanted her to keep her own bank account, but she refused." Suddenly he clenched his hands and stared hard at Dr. Van Buren. "By God, I can't believe that she would accept money from any man."

"I don't think she will, Phil," was the quick response. "However, we must reckon with many possibilities. We must look the hard facts squarely in the face. Marie was proud, yes, too proud to ask alms of any man.

"But there are times when one's pride wavers. You know, pride will not buy a meal when you are hungry, nor a bed to sleep in when you are sleepy. And pretty clothes are expensive. Marie was used to them.

"A woman driven out into the street as she was, is apt to become desperate. She——" He paused abruptly when he saw his friend wince. "I did not mean to tear open old wounds, Phil."

The latter looked away. It was some time before he turned to face Dr. Van Buren.

"I am going to get the facts so far as this affair is concerned," he said doggedly. "The Burns Detective Agency will handle that for me. I'll go to their offices at once, then have a talk with Police Commissioner

Farrel. He is an old friend of mine."

The physician nodded repeatedly.

"That is a good idea," he declared, "but there is a place we ought to visit before we do anything else."

Philip Gordon glanced at the speaker with questioning dread. "You mean——" He gasped.

"The morgue, Phil."

The horror of the thought drove Gordon from his chair. He began to walk up and down nervously.

"Come, let us make sure at once," he cried, taking his friend by the arm when the latter made no move. "I'll have my car brought to the door and we——"

"Don't trouble about that," the doctor broke in. "We will use my machine. It is standing out there."

Without further delay they hurried from the house and drove to the Chicago morgue. Dr. Van Buren was immediately granted all privileges the instant he made himself known.

They walked through a double row of silent figures. And as the face of every woman was uncovered, Philip Gordon closed his eyes before he dared to look.

But the body they dreaded to find was not there, and they silently thanked God as they came out into the sunlight again.

Next they visited Police Commissioner Farrel and the facts were laid before him in the secrecy of his private office. He knew all about Gordon's domestic tragedy and asked no useless or embarrassing questions.

"I'll have every nook and corner in this city searched at once," he promised as he shook his unhappy friend's hand. "You send me a late photograph of Mrs. Gordon as quickly as you can. If she is still in Chicago we will find her within the next twenty-four hours."

"And if she isn't in Chicago," Dr. Van Buren queried.

"I am not taking that thought into consideration," the police commissioner replied tartly. "I am going to act upon the theory that Mrs. Gordon is still in the city, and you may rest assured that we will find her."

Police Commissioner Farrel shook hands with his two visitors as they departed, then began to work.

Within an hour he had a photo of Mrs. Gordon. He had copies made of them which he distributed. Every police station received one.

The order was: "Find this woman." No other explanations were given. Below the picture were the words most interesting to the average police officer: "One thousand dollars reward."

In the meantime Gordon and Dr. Van Buren were visiting every hospital known to them in Chicago. No clue to Marie's whereabouts was found, however. It was close to evening when the two friends arrived at the club.

The physician had his own reason for persuading Gordon to go to the club with him. What he needed was some diversion which would take his mind away from unpleasant thoughts.

And Dr. Van Buren seemed to have the correct idea, for his friend seemed to brighten up as they entered the brilliantly lighted dining room. Phil Gordon had a host of friends, and those present greeted him in a manner which left no doubt as to his popularity.

"Now for a good, hearty dinner, Phil," the physician said as he selected a table near the window overlooking the street.

Gordon forced a smile. He made no reply but gazed at the cloudy sky for a moment, then his eyes became fastened on the line of rapidly moving automobiles below.

The sidewalk was crowded with pedestrians hur-

rying hither and thither. Presently he noticed a young woman standing on the curb. There was something about her figure that made him sit up straight with a jerk.

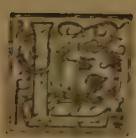
Her head was bowed. Very slowly she raised it, exposing her face to the glaring light under which she stood.

"Look, my God, look!" he gasped.

Before Dr. Van Buren could make a reply, Gordon had snatched his hat from the hook and was running for the door.

Chapter 156

NEW DEVELOPMENTS

 ILLIAN CRAWFORD was perhaps the unhappiest girl in the world. The arrest of the man she loved and who also loved her was a frightful blow. Not for a single moment did she believe that Victor Talbot had killed Roger Hawkins. She defended him hotly whenever the tragedy was discussed within her hearing.

Much comfort she derived from her daily visits to Mrs. Ruggles, the Talbot housekeeper. And strange to say, her stepmother did not forbid it.

Mrs. Crawford was, in a measure, no less unhappy than her pretty young stepdaughter. Since Talbot was in the toils of the law she longed to see him and talk to him as never before.

She would dream of him almost every night and think of him by day.

She made three trips to the prison where Victor was being held pending the trial, but on each occasion she was informed that Mr. Talbot refused to see anyone except his lawyer.

Upon her last trip she made a passionate appeal.

"Please tell Mr. Talbot that Mrs. Crawford must see him," she begged with tears in her eyes. "Tell him that I have some important news for him."

The answer was the same she had received on the other occasions:

"Mr. Talbot does not wish to speak to anyone, only his attorney."

Bitterly disappointed and hurt, too, the woman

returned home.

Then she sat down and wrote a letter offering to bring Lillian along if he would see her. His reply was that he would be glad to receive Miss Crawford without her stepmother.

This aroused the woman's wrath. That old feeling of jealousy seized her anew.

"No!" she hissed through her clenched teeth. "He'll never see that girl again if I can prevent it, and I think I can. I hope they hang him!"

But Mrs. Crawford would have been first to go to the governor of the great State of Illinois to intercede for Victor Talbot in case he was found guilty. Her love for him was something that could not be killed.

For days she remained in her room, brooding over the matter. A new source of worry loomed. What if Talbot was acquitted?

What would prevent him from eloping with Lillian? True enough, the girl was still under age, but once the marriage ceremony was performed, her last hope of capturing the handsome Victor would vanish.

So in order to be prepared for any eventuality she decided to find a suitable companion for Lillian.

What she wanted was a strong woman, not too scrupulous; a woman who could be depended upon to obey orders no matter what they may be.

In two of the Chicago newspapers she caused the following advertisements to be inserted:

"Wanted: Reliable middle aged woman as companion for wayward young girl. Those inclined to be weak and sympathetic need not apply. Liberal salary to the right party. Apply in person only. The Crawford estate, R. F. D., No. 10."

The following day not one single applicant came for the position. This was very unusual. But Mrs. Crawford showed no marked degree of disappointment.

She knew that women born and raised in the city were not anxious to live way out in the country.

"I'll have to try something different," she muttered to herself as she criticized the wording of the ad. "And I'll ask the applicants to meet me at the Blackstone Hotel."

The next time the advertisement appeared it was more genteel and more alluring.

With her hopes high, Mrs. Crawford drove to Chicago in her limousine and took a suite of rooms for the day at the above mentioned first class hotel.

Little did she dream that fate had decided to take a hand in the selection of the woman destined to be her stepdaughter's companion.

In the meantime Lillian continued her visits to the Talbot home. Naturally the main topic of discussion was the coming trial.

"We both believe that Mr. Talbot is not guilty," Mrs. Ruggles said to the young girl as they were seated in the cozy living room. "But I am afraid that won't help him. You and I must do some detective work. We must try to find a clue to the actual murderer."

Lillian was staring hard at the floor. Her lovely eyes were always misted over with a hint of tears. She was thinking hard.

"Oh," she cried suddenly. "I just happened to think of something. Mr. Hawkins used to quarrel with his valet. One evening I heard them exchange violent words and I am sure blows were struck. Do you think that——"

"For goodness sake, child!" Mrs. Ruggles exclaimed. "Why did you not mention that before?"

"It did not occur to me until this moment," the girl said. "But could this information help Victor in any way? If so, I'll go the police and repeat it. Oh, I hope it will," she added, her eyes burning with eagerness.

Mrs. Ruggles shook her head slowly.

"As a rule the police do not pay much attention to such information," she declared, her interest suddenly waning. "But if you had heard the valet threaten Mr. Hawkins and you could swear to that, we might be able to divert suspicion into a different channel.

"However, we will not forget about those quarrels. It is very likely that you will be called upon to testify in Victor Talbot's behalf. And in case you are, you must tell the truth about everything."

The young girl shuddered at the prospect of being compelled to appear in court, although she would gladly have endured any torture to free her lover.

"I am working on a clue of my own," the older woman went on, toning down her voice. "I am keeping an eye on George Warner. You know him don't you, Lillian? Of course you do.

"Well, Warner has been acting very strangely during the last few weeks. Whenever Mr. Talbot is away, he acts as a sort of a manager. That seems to swell his head, for he is really nothing more than an ordinary farmhand."

Lillian Crawford was leaning forward anxiously, drinking in every word that was said. As Mrs. Ruggles paused, she asked in a whisper:

"Do you think that Warner had something to do with the murder?"

"I am not prepared to claim that," Mrs. Ruggles replied. "But I have more than a mere suspicion that he knows more about the disappearance of Mr. Talbot's

rifle than he is willing to admit. That rifle was not taken from the case by Mr. Talbot. I am almost sure of that."

"If you could prove that, would it help Victor?" gasped the girl.

"That's just it," was the deliberate response. "I am not able to prove it just yet. I happen to know, however, that Warner harbored some sort of a secret grudge against Mr. Talbot. They had a misunderstanding not so long go. From that time on Warner grumbled a great deal."

The young girl sat wringing her hands Hope rose and fell alternately in her bosom.

Of one thing she was absolutely sure. If Victor Talbot was convicted of murder and sentenced to be hung, she would not survive him for even a day.

What would life be without this hero of her dreams? There was not another man like him in the whole world.

The conversation between Mrs. Ruggles and Lillian lasted much longer than usual. When the young girl left the Talbot home, it was quite dark.

"I think I better go with you, dear," the older woman offered.

"No," Lillian smiled sadly. "You needn't Mrs. Ruggles. It is not so far, and I am not a bit afraid."

Mrs. Ruggles thought a moment.

"Then you better take the road," she suggested. "Don't you walk over the path that leads through the woods. It may be a short cut, but it is not safe."

"Why not?" the girl wanted to know. "You never heard of anyone being held up in this part of the neighborhood. And besides, I haven't anything worth stealing."

The older woman smiled at Lillian's child-like in-

nocence.

"How little you know about men," she said, patting the girl's soft cheek. "With the exception of a few, perhaps, they are all selfish brutes at heart. You can't trust them out of your sight, and I sure would hate to see anything happen to you."

Once more Mrs. Ruggles insisted upon walking home with Lillian, but the girl steadfastly refused.

"I am not afraid," she repeated. "You just go to bed, for I know how tired you must be after your hard day's work. Good night, dear friend. I'll come over again to-morrow."

"Alright," said Mrs. Ruggles and kissed the girl affectionately.

Miss Crawford skipped down the steps which led from the front veranda to the walk ending at the road.

Once she turned and looked back The housekeeper waved a hand at her, then disappeared into the house.

Lillian's fear was not about being accosted on the way home. What she really feared was what her stepmother would say after she got there. Never before had she remained until such a late hour at the Talbot residence.

If she did not succeed in reaching her room without being seen, there would be trouble.

And so, in order to shorten the distance, she disregarded Mrs. Ruggles' warning. She made a dash for the path leading through the woods.

She had not gone more than fifty yards when she had the instinctive feeling that she was being followed.

As she glanced hurriedly over her shoulder she thought she saw the figure of a man. Yes, she began to feel quite sure of it.

The sudden dread which possessed her caused her

to retrace her steps and get back to the country road. But this decision came too late.

She was about to pass through some thick underbrush when a man barred the pass. At first she did not recognize him. But the moment he spoke she knew who it was.

"Oh, Mr. Warner," she said, her young heart beating furiously, "I am so glad it is you."

"Well," he grinned, "I am glad because you are glad, Miss Crawford. I saw you cut through here and I followed you. Don't you know that you are taking an awful chance?"

"Mrs. Ruggles asked me to take the road," she answered, "but it is so late and I am in a hurry to get home."

"So I imagine," the man returned. "That stepmother of yours is a devil. I suppose you'll get heck when you get back. You know," he added in an intimate tone, "I feel very sorry for you, Lillian. Mrs. Crawford does not treat you right. If I were you——"

"Don't you think you are going too far, Mr. Warner?" the young girl cut in, drawing herself up. "I am not in need of sympathy from you. Please let me pass."

Lillian Crawford had the pride of her race. She was not a snob by any means, but she disliked discussing family affairs with servants.

With her head erect she attempted to slip past the man, but he would not permit it.

"Please don't get angry," Warner begged. "I assure you I meant no offense. I am sorry I said what I did. You are anxious to get back home. Let me accompany you through the woods. It will bring you home in a few minutes. You don't have to be afraid of me."

"I am not afraid of you," she replied haughtily, and turned away.

She intended to show him that she meant what she said. But Warner kept pace with her.

Neither spoke another word until they reached about the middle of the woods. Lillian uttered a little scream when she was suddenly seized by the arm and swung around.

"How dare you?" she gasped, anger shaking her.

"Cut that stuff," Warner shot back, still holding her. "I have something to say that will interest you. Will you listen?"

"No, I will not listen!" the girl cried. "Let me go or I'll scream at the top of my voice."

"But it is something about — about the murder, Lillian. What would you say if I told you that I am able to prove that Mr. Talbot did not do the shooting."

Instantly the girl ceased struggling.

She was interested—yes, intensely interested.

"You—you could prove that, Mr. Warner?" she gasped.

"I could if I wanted to," came back.

For a moment Lillian held her breath.

"Did you know that Mr. Talbot was innocent when he was arrested?" she demanded.

"Well, now," Warner drawled, "I am not yet ready to tell you all I know. But I will if you make it worth while."

She stared at him, and even in the darkness she could see the peculiar expression on his face.

Quite naturally her first thought was that Warner wanted money for divulging what he knew.

"I—I haven't any money with me," she declared, fingering her empty purse nervously. "But I'll pay you any reasonable sum you ask if you help me clear Victor Talbot."

He took a step closer and stared into her eyes

until they wavered and fell.

"But it may not be just money I am after," he said meaningly.

"Not—not money?" the girl breathed, sick with sudden dread.

Warner shook his head.

"Why, no. You are a very beautiful girl, Lillian. Perhaps you never suspected that a man like me might fall in love with you. But that is what has happened. Give me one little kiss and——"

The last sentence was cut short as Miss Crawford's open hand closed the man's mouth with a resounding whack. Then she turned and ran.

She heard his curse. She heard the thudding of his feet as he came after her. She stifled the impulse to scream, for it was one sure way of informing her stepmother that she had overstayed her time at the Talbot home. Her pulses were flying as she noticed that Warner was gaining. The awakened woman in her told her what was in store for her if the man got her into his clutches.

Chapter 157

JULIA CAREY

PHILLIP GORDON reached the street after elbowing his way laboriously through the crowd of men filling the corridor. He looked back several times to see if Van Buren was following him, but the latter was nowhere to be seen. Rain had begun to patter on the sidewalk and the throng of pedestrians had disappeared as if by magic. The wind was blowing from the north and it was getting colder.

Gazing anxiously across the street, he found the young woman whose familiar face had startled him gone.

Walking to the end of the block in spite of the increasing downpour, he allowed his eyes to wander searchingly in every direction.

He was about to return to the club and turned slowly, very much disappointed. As he did so he noticed the slight figure of a woman emerge from the half lighted doorway leading to a Chop Suey Restaurant.

Gordon faced her expectantly. It was the same woman.

"I beg your pardon," she said timidly. "Will you——"

The way he stared at her made her pause with alarm.

"Who are you?" he cried hoarsely.

"I?" The woman came a step closer and scrutinized his features.

There was a little gasp of horror, then she wheeled about and ran. Gordon was taken by surprise, but he

took after her with all the speed of which he was capable.

When he finally caught up with the woman, he seized her by the arm and swung her around.

"I want to know who you are and why you ran away from me?" he exclaimed, out of breath.

The woman kept her face averted.

"Let me go—please let me go," she begged in a voice strangely familiar.

She made a frantic effort to tear herself away from him, but he held her securely in his grasp.

Very slowly her head was turned, and he stared at her face, so much like that of his first wife. There was the same familiar quiver about the lips.

Suddenly a vicious gust of wind caught her skirts and sent the rain splashing into her face.

Without a word he drew her back from where they had started, and under the shelter of the immense glass hood over the club entrance.

Gordon saw Dr. Van Buren standing in the entrance, watching their approach with curious interest.

A quick motion brought him forward.

"What's the idea, Phil?" he said remonstratingly. "You know you can't bring that sort of a woman into the club. Where are your——"

A warning glance from Gordon stopped him.

The woman hung her head, shrinking under the appraising scrutiny of the two men.

She bore the familiar earmarks—rouge and powder on her cheeks, blackened eyebrows and painted lips. There was not the least doubt as to her method of making a living.

Gordon was still somewhat in doubt as to the woman's identity.

"Why did you run away from me?" he asked

kindly.

For the first time she met his eyes fully.

"Phil—don't you know me?" Her voice came like a sob.

"Julia—Julia Carey." He cried, aghast. "Yes, I know you now. But—I never expected to find you—like this."

A sudden spasm of weeping seized the woman.

The two men looked understandingly at each other as they noticed her thin waist and shabby short skirt. Her silk stockings showed touches of the darning needle.

Dr. Van Buren motioned toward the club, but the other shook his head.

Obviously they could not remain standing where they were, and to take her into the club was utterly out of the question.

Philip Gordon was in a quandary. All day he had been in search of his wife, and this is what he found.

The cynical turn of fate brought a bitter smile to his face. While both men stood there unable to decide what to do, the voice of the woman startled them.

"Phil, I am so hungry," she said pitifully.

"Hungry?" he repeated, astounded beyond words. "Good God."

Dr. Van Buren intervened.

"There is a nice little restaurant down the street, Phil," he suggested. "I am hungry myself and you ought to be. Come, let us take Miss Carey with us and have a good dinner together."

"Very well." Gordon made a motion to place a wrap on the woman's trembling shoulders, but that part of her wearing apparel was missing. "Come, Julia."

The rain abated for a moment as they hurried down the street, across Michigan Avenue, and up the

steps of the restaurant.

There were quite a few people in the dining room, but no-one paid the slightest attention to the newcomers.

Dr. Van Burn led the way to a small table, set in a screened window which commanded a view of the opposite corner of Michigan Avenue.

A waiter had followed them, and as he pulled out a chair for the woman, she sank into it with a sigh.

Without saying a word, Phil Gordon handed her the menu card. His mind was too full for utterance. Here he was confronted with a new problem difficult to solve.

"Now order what you want and plenty of it," Dr. Van Buren broke the embarrassing silence. He smiled genially. "We can have a nice chat while we eat."

While Julia Carey was studying the menu card, Gordon kicked the physician's foot. When their eyes met, the former shook his head and placed a finger on his lips.

Dr. Van Buren understood. It meant: "Not a word about Marie."

Both men watched the woman through the corners of their eyes. She was slenderly built, with good lines, and there was a light suppleness about her movements that was very graceful.

Her hands were well formed, he fingers slim and tapering. She had a wealth of wavy dark hair, which was bobbed, and her dusky eyes were large and fine.

Barring the hard lines about her large, somewhat sensuous mouth and the occasional annoying flicker of her eyes, she was still beautiful.

The physician was studying the woman's features intently and with constantly growing interest. Something indefinable about her impressed him.

The waiter was standing respectfully behind the

woman's chair, making the order on a pad of paper as she dictated it to him.

Dr. Van Buren and Gordon ordered what they wanted. While they waited, several attempts were made to strike up a conversation interesting to all three of them.

The usual commonplace remarks fell flat. Neither of the men dared to approach the subject uppermost in their minds.

Julia Carey read the question in the eyes of both men.

Presently the waiter returned. The moment he placed the dishes before the woman, she began to eat ravenously.

"Ah, it is good to be in the warm and have all you want to eat," she said in a low, fervent tone. "It is the first time that I am really comfortable in three weeks, and——"

She paused abruptly and blushed. Both men were staring at her with blank amazement in their eyes.

"Good heavens, Julia," Gordon spoke at last. "It—it doesn't seem possible. Really, I can't understand this. I was always under the impression that your stage career was a complete success."

The girl uttered a short laugh.

"Of course, you were," she responded. "You got these impressions from the letters I wrote to Marie. You know, a woman learns how to fib to her respectable relations when things go wrong."

Gordon turned away. He did not know what to answer.

"I wouldn't have Marie know about this for anything in the world," she went on hurriedly. "She was always so proud and straight as a arrow. Ah, how I envy her. And how happy she must be with her two

little kiddies.

"You and Marie were the best matched couple I ever saw step before the altar," Julia continued, little suspecting that every word cut Philip Gordon to the very soul. "I shall never forget that swell wedding of yours. And, say, do you remember how I shocked some of your highbrow friends?"

Gordon groaned inwardly.

He could not look at the woman for fear of betraying what was going on in his madly churning mind.

Dr. Van Buren fully appreciated the situation and his heart went out to his friend.

He gave the conversation a quick turn by asking with a directness which made Julia Carey wince:

"Why do you do this sort of thing?"

"What else can I do?" she flared back.

"There are lots of ways of making an honest living, now days."

"For instance?"

"I am sure a girl of your intelligence can find work in a chorus, or office, or a department store——"

"Where you can stand on your feet ten hours a day and earn ten dollars a week, if you are lucky," she interrupted him. "Besides, who'll give you a position without the best of references? Believe me, Mr. Van Buren, I have tried it and I know."

"But why didn't you go to your sister and your brother-in-law here, when trouble came to you?" the physician queried.

"I inherited the pride of all the Careys," she retorted bitterly. "You know, when one sets out on a chosen career, defying conventionalities and ignoring protesting relatives and friends, that person is not likely to come back proclaiming her failure from the housetops.

"That is my case exactly. The only mistake I made was coming back to Chicago. And that my career as an actress flunked is not altogether my fault. I want you to understand that."

"How long have you been back?" Gordon inquired at this point a little anxiously.

"Just three weeks," she replied. "Oh, I might have known that I would run up against some people I was not anxious to meet. I am going to beat it back to Hollywood as soon as I——"

She paused, dropping her eyes in confusion before the penetrating gaze of her brother-in-law.

"Why didn't you finish?" the latter inquired as he leaned across the table.

"Do you want me to?" Julia demanded.

He nodded.

"Well, then—" the woman glanced about the nearly empty room like one afraid of being overheard. "—just as soon as I make money enough to pay for the trip."

Philip Gordon moved uneasily in his seat. He knew what this meant.

But Julia Carey would never again walk the streets of Chicago so long as he was able to prevent it. For the first time he felt the desire of being alone with his sister-in-law.

Julia was eating her desert, and appeared to enjoy every morsel of it immensely.

She was so occupied with this pleasant task that she failed to notice it when Phil hastily scribbled a few words on one of the menu cards and shoved it toward Dr. Van Buren.

A moment later the latter pulled out his watch.

"I am sorry I have to be leaving," he announced as he rose. "I must make another call before I go home

You won't mind, will you, Phil?"

"Not at all," Gordon's ready retort came. "But be sure to come out to Oak Manor to-morrow."

The physician promised. He shook hands with Julia Carey, then with Phil, and departed.

The woman looked after him with a peculiar expression in her eyes.

"I like him," she said frankly. "Is he married?"

"No, he isn't," Gordon frowned. After a long moment of silence he burst out: "God, what a mess you got yourself in, Julia. And to think that you have nerve enough to walk the Chicago streets."

"I told you I was going away again," the woman replied in a hurt tone.

Phil reached into his pocket and produced a roll of bills. It was absolutely imperative that Julia Carey leave the city as quickly as possible.

What frightful scandal would follow if her downfall became public property. Marie's name was bound to suffer also, for she was a Carey.

"Here are five hundred dollars, Julia," he said, passing the bills over to her. "Buy yourself some decent clothes to-morrow and go back to Hollywood on the first train."

The woman clutched the money eagerly.

"You are a sport, Phil," she murmured. "And I won't forget this. Maybe some day I'll be able to do something for you. But," she added, lowering her voice, "please don't tell Marie that you met me. It would break her heart to know that I—I sank so low."

Gordon choked back a groan.

There was no danger of him telling Marie, for he had not the least idea where she was. Little did he dream when he set out to find a trace of his first wife that he would stumble across a dreadful surprise like this.

It afforded him a degree of comfort however, that Julia was ignorant of his domestic troubles.

Not for the world would he have told her of the brutal treatment he accorded her sister. She must never know that he had divorced her and married Alice Procter.

"Don't worry about that," he declared. "Marie will never find out through me, that you and I had a late dinner together. But I want you to promise me one thing, Julia. Promise me to go straight from this night on.

"If you need more money, write to me and address the letter to my office. Here is my card. I'll send you a check by return mail."

The woman's eyes became moist. She grasped Gordon's hand impulsively and kissed it.

"That—that is all I wanted, you dear boy," she almost sobbed. "All I ever wanted was a chance to hold my own and keep straight. But they gave me a dirty deal. I can still act, and believe me, when I get another foothold in Hollywood, I'll pay you back with interest."

"You don't have to ever pay me back," Gordon told her. "You've got it in you to succeed in your chosen profession. You were always a fine actress and your looks have not suffered much.

"What you need now is a few weeks rest and a moral rejuvenation. Get both and start all over again. Don't forget, I'll back you up. But—but—," he hesitated, "get out of Chicago as soon as you can."

Julia Carey was fingering Gordon's business card.

"You'll hear from me at this address," she said. "I mean to keep in touch with you from now on, Phil. Now run along home to your wife. And remember, I trust you with a secret."

Gordon nodded, shook hands with her and left.

Chapter 158

THE NEW COMPANION

ILLIAN CRAWFORD had managed to escape from her pursuer by some of the fastest running she ever did in her young life. Feeling by instinct that Warner would show her no mercy if he caught up with her, she raced madly toward home. Never had she seen a more welcome sight when the house loomed up before her.

She paused to get her breath. From where she stood she could see that every window was dark, which seemed to indicate that all the servants and also her step-mother had gone to bed.

Very quietly she approached the front entrance—the only one to which she had a key.

Still under the sway of considerable excitement, she did not notice the woman seated in a chair on the veranda.

A slight, creaking noise attracted her attention a moment later. She stopped dead in her tracks.

"Oh, yes, I am waiting for you," her step-mother's voice said sharply.

The young girl knew that she was in for a good scolding now.

"Where have you been?" Mrs. Crawford demanded trying hard to keep the angry tone down.

"I—I called on Mrs. Ruggles," Lillian stammered.

"What for?"

"Just to—to have a chat, mother."

"You know that I disapprove of that."

Continued in next number

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